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BOOK WORLD

# After the Tragedy of Jonestown

**WHITE NIGHT.** By John Peer Nugent. Rawson, Wade. 278 pp. \$11.95

**THE STRONGEST POISON.** By Mark Lane. Hawthorn. 494 pp. \$12.95

By KENNETH WOODEN

**WHITE NIGHT** by John Nugent is an accurate, fast moving, analytical account of Jim Jones and his People's Temple organization. Unlike Mark Lane, Nugent sticks to the issue of Jonestown and the bizarre events that thrust it into national and international focus.

Nugent, a correspondent and advisor on Africa who specializes in Third World affairs, has written a comprehensive and easy to read account of the facts about Jonestown and the questions still left unanswered. As he traces Jones' "ministry" from Indiana to the final moments in Guyana, we see a power hungry, religious hustler whose mind is gradually being destroyed by drugs.

Nugent's treatment of the influence the late, legendary cult leader, Father Divine of Philadelphia, had on Jones is brilliant and fascinating. A weekend with Divine "metamorphosed" Jones. The "maverick" became a "megalomaniac" and the "similarities in their careers and operating styles [were] uncanny."

While Jones was always a quasi-religious person, he was foremost a master politician. California, especially San Francisco, was made to order for his vision of building a coalition of senior citizens who loved that old-fashioned religion of songs and preaching, and youth, lonely men and women, whose battle with poverty, war and racism was begging for an outlet. Unfortunately, the coalition became a caldron.

Until the government releases the copious tapes and files on the People's Temple that will provide a better understanding of what happened at Jonestown and why it happened, *White Night* stands far above any other book written to date, as an important insight into that significant and tragic event.

Mark Lane's narrative of the Jonestown tragedy, on the other hand, is self-serving, egotistical and intellectually dishonest. It is first and foremost a book about the author. It is Lane who is persecuted by the "intelligence gathering community and their faithful servants, the media." The real victims of Jim Jones' madness are used like junior high school stage props in this dreadful 482-page account of Lane's personal problems with the press.

The controversial author (*Rush to Judgement*) characterizes Jones as one of his own ilk—a martyr unfairly persecuted by the media and the government. While he minimizes the cult leader's behavioral patterns of theft, extortion, drug addiction, rape, assorted sexual perversion and mass murder, he portrays Tim Stoen (Jones' former legal advisor and a high official of People's Temple) as the real villain.

In fact, Stoen ultimately became another victim of Jones. After Tim Stoen and his wife, Grace, defected from People's Temple, they began a deadly legal battle with Jim Jones for custody of their son, John Victor, whom Jones claimed to have sired. When the courts awarded custody to the parents, Jones refused to release the child and threatened mass suicide before he would relinquish the boy.

But Lane, an officer of the courts, chooses to ignore those court decisions—"Jones feared that his son, John Victor Stoen, would be taken from him"—then goes on to label Stoen's love for his son a cover-up, because he wasn't the father and was, Lane implies, a CIA agent under command of sinister forces in the U.S. that wanted to destroy Jim Jones and People's Temple.

In an ongoing diatribe, Lane levels the finger of guilt at the press ("Anthony Lewis . . . minister of propaganda; Sulzberger, who rents his integrity to the CIA"), government agencies, People's Temple defectors and fellow PT lawyer, Charles Gerry, for aggravating a rapidly deteriorating situation. The reader is told by Lane that after returning home from his first visit to Jonestown in September, 1978, "I began at once to work to lessen tensions in Jonestown by securing information about government actions toward the community and by trying to open lines of communications between Jonestown and fair and responsible journalists within the United States."

What Lane actually did, however, was expertly to feed Jones' paranoia in a "Confidential—Attorney/Client Memo" to the cult leadership on September 27, 1979:

"Even a cursory examination reveals that there has been a coordinated campaign to destroy the PT and to impugn the reputation of its leader, Bishop Jim Jones. This campaign has involved . . . the CIA, FBI, IRS, the U.S. Post Office and the FCC and their agents and employees."

According to two families who survived the "suicides" and talked with Washington lawyer, Joseph H. Blatchford, Lane told the people of Jonestown over the loud speakers and radio that the FBI and CIA would torture them if they ever talked to them.

The paradox of Lane's new conspiracy—the government/media plot to destroy People's Temple—is that, in reality, Jones had powerful political connections at the local, state and federal levels. A point of fact is that concerned relatives, who fought to save their loved ones, found themselves at dead ends in every direction. Most bureaucrats, at best, looked the other way.

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Much of Lane's inside information comes from Terri Buford, who defected from People's Temple three weeks before the tragedy and found "political sanctuary" in Lane's own home. While hiding the very person his client, Jim Jones, wanted found, Lane learned of the bizarre behavior of Jones. Buford disclosed an earlier threat and actual attempt to kill over 500 people by burning them in a warehouse if Jones was forced to turn John Victor Stoen over to his parents. She also confided that Jones was a drug addict: "He was sustained by a morphine substitute, injectable Valium, various barbituates and codeine . . . In addition, he drank Cognac," that he kept an armed "concentration camp" and used perverted sex for purposes of control and destruction of his followers.

One wonders why Terri Buford, armed with this diabolical information, worked "the Hill" in Washington with Marci Jones, to spread word of the virtues of their leader. Nowhere in this book, do we find Lane or Buford sharing her revelations with anyone who could have prevented the Jonestown disaster, not even Congressman Leo Ryan.

Lane winds it all up by saying that his bad press is worse than the fate of 276 children:

"There is indeed a poison in our land. It is stronger than the poison placed in the mouths of the children of Jonestown. Until we recognize it, understand its virulence and act against it, our pretensions of a free press in an open society are but a sad and painful mockery of what might have been."

The strongest poison is Mark Lane. Both he and the book are an affront to any informed person. Nothing has been served except to desecrate the deaths of innocent people who were misled by Jones and those who apologize for him. And that includes Mark Lane. □